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CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

JOHN JAY, Esq.,

AND THE

VESTRY OF ST. MATTHEW'S CHURCH,

BEDFORD, N. Y.

1862.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

Mr. Jay's Letter on his Non-Appointment to the Episcopal Convention from St. Matthew's, Bedford.

To Messrs. Charles Raymond, E. D. Brown, Wm. P. Woodcock, Augustus Keeler, Wm. Lockwood, J. T. Banks, J. J. Cox, J. W. Husted, James H. Birdsall, and Robert Bolton, Wardens and Vestrymen of St. Matthew's Church, Bedford.

Sirs :—I have received the following resolution, unanimously adopted by you on the 21st September :

"*Resolved*, That heretofore, out of respect to Mr. Jay's feelings while in the Vestry, we elected him as one of our delegates to the Convention ; but, since his voluntary resignation as a member of the Vestry, we now feel at liberty to state our reason for not again nominating him to said Convention, which is, that he has for several years misrepresented this parish by introducing the Slavery question, to the injury thereof."

I am obliged to you for thus distinctly declaring the reason why I am displaced from a position in the Convention to which I was first elected by the Vestry of St. Matthew's nearly thirty years ago. But while commending your frankness in this respect, I am compelled to disapprove the time and manner of my dismissal. Knowing as you did that former Conventions had imposed upon me grave duties in connection with the Committee on the Acts of Incorporation, and especially with the Parochial fund, which for years I had been laboring to ring to completion—duties that could not be properly per-

formed unless I were returned to the next Convention. I think that, in common fairness, you should have afforded me an opportunity to secure a seat from another parish. To keep me in ignorance of your intention to displace me until the last moment before the sitting of the Convention, when my chance of obtaining a seat elsewhere had become almost an impossibility, seems to me, I confess, rather sharp practice for a church vestry. It looks as if Judge Robertson and his political associates, Democratic and Whig, who, at the last Easter election, as I learned from your rector, invaded the church and elected a vestry, had endowed you with their practice as well as their votes, and had transplanted from their accustomed caucuses to your quiet chancel the seeds of the political trickery that has so demoralized our country, and disgraced our town.

I am inclined to hope that such a supposition would do some members of your body great injustice ; that they intended no such unhandsome thing ; and, if this be so, they will be glad to learn that the wrong to the Diocese which your silent and deferred action had so nearly accomplished, has been repaired by your sister parish of St. Phillip's, the vestry of which have been prompt to tender me a seat, which I have as promptly accepted. As soon as it was known that you had not reappointed me, proposals were made from other parishes, but I did not hesitate an instant in giving the preference to St. Phillip's, on the ground that there was no parish more justly entitled to protect the Diocesan interests which you had imperiled, or to maintain the great principles involved in my dismissal.

Touching the reason given by you for your action, I shall not hesitate to imitate the frankness you have exhibited in arraigning me for my past course. Every electoral body has a right to criticise the conduct and principles of their representative, and every representative thus criticised and condemned has a right to defend himself. I now stand before the

diocese adjudged by the Vestry of St. Matthew's unfit to represent any longer the parish which I have represented at intervals for the life-time of a generation. Your resolution declares that I have "for several years misrepresented the parish by introducing the Slavery question, to the injury thereof."

It is not quite clear from the language whether it is the parish or Slavery that I have injured. If, as the order of your words implies, you mean that Slavery has suffered from my course in the Convention, I accept your testimony with thanks. But if you mean that I have in any way injured the parish, I am willing to rely for my defense upon the record of the past and the verdict of the future.

The same looseness of language marks the first clause of the paragraph which implies that I have introduced the question of Slavery, as it exists in other diocese, since we have no Slavery in our own. The fact happens to be, as you ought to know, that the resolution introduced had reference not to Slavery without, but to the slave-trade within the diocese, as carried on from the headquarters of the internal traffic in our limits, and under our own jurisdiction, in the seat of the Episcopate, and in the heart of our oldest parish—the Parish of Trinity.

With regard to this daring crime, defying alike the laws of God and the statutes of the Republic, I simply asked the Convention to stand in the old paths, to hold fast the truths of which the Church was intended to be the pillar, and to re-enact, without addition or amendment, the ancient Canon of the Council of London, which declared that men and women ought not to be sold like brute animals.

Had the members of that Convention, who claimed to be conservative, re-enacted that simple Canon, to our diocesan Church of New York would have belonged a share of the glory of abolishing the African slave-trade, which is now in a fair way of being extinguished, apart from the interruption

of its market by the fidelity of Mr. Lincoln, the admirable treaty of Mr. Seward, and the incorruptible integrity of Mr. Marshal Murray.

So, too, with Slavery. Had the Church obeyed the injunction to remember them that are in bonds, or bound with them, and boldly stood between the living and the dead, to stay the plague that troubles us, what a reward might have been here! In the vain hope of preserving with Southern Slaveholders a worthless harmony, she has preserved silence on the nearest and worst of crimes—forgetting, in the words of Coleridge, that "the guilt of excusing a wicked action is only second to that of committing it," and now the Northern Church finds its fellowship spurned and itself despised, and the Slave power strengthened by the support of Northern Christians, while feeding on the oppression of the blacks, is at last engaged in a struggle for life and death with its late eulogists, apologists and defenders, for whom it exhibits the bitterest hatred and the most profound contempt.

Since the struggle commenced I have not asked the Convention to condemn Slavery in any shape, for it is condemned in every loyal breast as traitorous to the Republic, and cursed at every fireside, which mourns a soldier whom Slavery has murdered. The silence of the clergy is broken, and the old miracle is renewed. The eyes of the blind are opened; the tongues of the dumb are loosed, and those who stammered when they spoke of the peculiar institution have learned to speak with plainness.

The oldest of our learned divines, like the most honest of our Democratic statesmen, and the most gallant of our generals, those who have been the warmest champions of Southern institutions, and the most decided in their opposition to the anti-slavery movement, confess too late, their fatal error, and frankly acknowledge what the whole world now clearly sees, that the Anti-Slavery movement commenced in 1830, to check the extension of Slavery—rescue the National Government

from its control, and place that government on the side of freedom, was based religiously on the holiest of truths, and politically, on the wisest and soundest construction of the Constitution ; and, that had that policy prevailed, the nation and the world would have been spared the shame of this infamous rebellion, whose avowed aim it is to base a Slave Empire on the ruins of our Republic. The very name of Abolitionists once used to designate a handful is now applied to the millions who stand by the Constitution, against the traitors of the South, their base allies of the North, and their sympathizers in foreign lands. A General in Missouri recently said that there was reason to doubt the loyalty of any man who had not been denounced as an Abolitionist; and even here, men of earnest loyalty are honored with a higher grade. Dr. Vinton of Trinity tells me that he is accustomed to be called "a colored Abolitionist." In view of these facts, gentlemen, you can hardly expect for your action in regard to Slavery at this moment the applause it might have received a short year or two ago. Times have changed ; and you may seek in vain on loyal soil for a fair appreciation of your effort to shield Slavery from rebuke, although it will doubtless be appreciated at Richmond, and might perhaps win you the blessing of that right reverend traitor and Rebel Major-General, Bishop Leonidas Polk.

Did my past experience permit me to be astonished at any folly or inconsistency on the part of Christian bodies, or any villainly on the part of political caucuses, I might, I think, have felt a mild surprise at your selecting this moment, when Slavery, like its twin infamy, the slave-trade, is about to meet its doom at the hands of an indignant and betrayed people, for such an interference in its behalf from the ancient and venerable Parish of St. Matthew.

Accustomed as I have been, in other days, to bear rebukes, year by year repeated from the Episcopal Convention, in the matter of the admission of St. Phillip's, as a fanatic, an incen-

diary, a disorganizer, and profoundly ignorant of church principles, crowned as that long contest was, in its ninth year, by a vote in which the clergy by a majority of ten to one stamped with their approval the principle for which I had contended, and condemned as factious and uncanonical the opposition I had met, you will hardly expect me to feel very sensibly, so far as I am alone concerned, a vote of censure from a vestry whose election was superintended by town politicians for political purposes.

And yet one or two of your names associated with the Church in the days of my boyhood incline me to regret that your action was unanimous. In whatever I have done in former years in the Convention or elsewhere to array the Christian Church of our country against Slavery, I have but feebly endeavored to carry out the principles of my grandfather, who declared that "until America comes into this measure (emancipation), her prayers to heaven will be impious." That too, as you well know, was the sentiment that during a long and active life animated my father, whose remains repose in your churchyard, and whose pure spirit for half a century was interested in the prosperity of the parish, and whose bounty, continued beyond the grave, still aids in its support.

How far under such circumstances propriety demands on the part of the Vestry a decent respect to their principles, their example, and their memories, is a question upon which opinions may differ; but I may say this—that while I trust and believe that Slavery and the Rebellion are presently to die together, and that our country is to be united and free, yet if this hope is to be disappointed—if Slavery, no longer the oppressor only of the black man, but the cruel and treacherous foe of our country, shall escape the doom that seems to impend, and survive the 1st January, 1863—which this nation by its Executive has fixed for its extinction in the Rebel States—the thought that, at such a moment as the pre-

sent, Slavery has found convenient defenders in the parish of St. Matthews, will not lessen the resolution formed in boyhood at all convenient times and in every proper way to labor for its extinction.

I pray those loyal men of your number, by whom this appeal may be heeded, to consider whether this is a proper time for admitting into the church personal and party broils, and compelling lines of seperation between those who should stand side by side for our common country. Is this a time to be dragging up old issues, and giving aid and comfort to the enemy, by showing him that Slavery, traitorous and bloody as it is with the best life-blood of the North, is tenderly cared for by a Northern vestry, who, instead of defeating the sympathizers about them, are rebuking me for my anti-slave trade action in years gone by?

These are times when words are things, and when a word hastly spoken, and an act thoughtlessly done, may have remote consequences that we little dream of.

It has come to us as it came to our fathers, that upon our individual and united action rests the destiny of the Republic, and of free institutions. It is a solemn moment. The responsibility cannot be shirked. It attaches to every act that may even remotely affect the issue, but especially to every act that may be supposed to imply a disposition to preserve and protect Slavery, that curse to humanity and to the Republic.

That sham Republicans and Secession sympathizers are plotting in your midst is true, but I trust that among your number are some who will be startled when they consider the significancy of their recent action, and ask themselves if it were well timed, reflect upon the position to which that action will consign them on the future page of the History of the Rebellion.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN JAY.

The Jay Homestead, Bedford, *Sept.* 23, 1862.

Answer to Mr. Jay's Letter to the Vestry of St. Matthew's Church, Bedford.

JOHN JAY, ESQ.—SIR: Very reluctantly we find ourselves, by the advice of friends and a sense of self-respect, compelled to appear before the public in answer to your letter of Sept. 23d. We know well of how little importance we in our humble sphere as individuals or incorporation are to the world at large, still we ask, as an act of justice, that those who have read your misrepresentations will read our plain statement of facts.

While we may differ from you as to the propriety of thus placing before the public, and in a secular paper, a church matter, the knowledge of which would otherwise have been almost entirely confined to our own little community, we agree with you that you have a perfect right to defend your past course in the Diocesan Convention; and had you, in your letter, confined yourself to this point, we should not have thought of replying; most unhappily this was not the case—you have thought proper in making your defense to misrepresent the reasons of our action; and also to insinuate, if not to make directly, charges affecting our veracity, our Churchmanship and our loyalty. Sir, we cannot but hope, that when you in sober second-thought reflect upon the gravity of these accusations, and how little foundation there is for them, you will feel sorry for what you have written; and that you have thus, without cause, insulted men, some of whom are much older than yourself; and all of whom have characters as christians and as citizens, as dear to them, as is your own to you. We cannot but think that the memory of your ancestors, to which you appeal, is more disrespectfully treated, by

the course you have seen fit to pursue, than by any action we may have taken.

We cannot admit that the deep respect we all feel for the memory of your grandfather and father, ought to influence us to act against our own sense of right in any matter. They themselves, would have been the last persons to put forward such an idea—and here we may add, for the information of the world, that "your father's bounty" to which you allude, goes not to the support of the parish, as you say, but is a personal annuity to the present Rector, and ceases when he leaves Bedford.

We cannot either admit that the acts of past Conventions, in having made you a Trustee,.&c., or a member of a Committee on Canons, ought to interfere in any way with our freedom of choice of a delegate; and we must confess that we have been unable to discover from the reports of the proceedings of the Convention just ended that any very "grave duties" were there performed by you. In our ignorance, we think the reading of a report—the only act of yours of which we have heard—might, without great detriment, have been read by another Trustee nearly as well, so that, even had not our "sister parish" come to the rescue, the Diocese of New York might possibly have survived the "wrong" to it and the "interests imperiled" by our sad neglect of duty. And, by the way, it seems also hard for us to understand how it can have been that, if our action was so deferred that your "chance of obtaining a seat elsewhere had become almost an impossibility," you still had time to receive "proposals from *other parishes*" beside the "sister parish of St. Phillip's." But we humbly beg pardon for our ignorance in these cases; we are but simple countrymen after all, and this, our ignorance, must also be our excuse for not having informed you, before the day of election—before we knew that we were going to do it—of our intention to displace you as a delegate. The

election was held at the usual time, and we are inclined to suppose that it would have been rather an impertinent act in any individual to have told you beforehand that you would not be elected. You think we were guilty of "sharp practice." Alas, sir, you now see that we are very dull and ignorant. We are even unable to discover the "seeds of political trickery" which you fear were on Easter last "transplanted" "to our quiet chancel." Let us hope they "fell by the wayside."

It may, however, appear to others somewhat of an impertinence on our part to have sent you the resolution we did; inasmuch as no cause for so doing appears in your letter. We undoubtedly had a right to elect you or not, and were not bound to give any excuse, and it may seem wrong to have forced upon you the reason why we did not. Had you published the whole of the proceedings, a copy of which we sent you, the public would have understood the matter. It was not quite fair in you to have omitted all mention of this. We will now quote the last resolution sent you:

"*Resolved*, That the Clerk be requested to send a copy of these proceedings to Mr. Jay, in order that the Rev. Mr. Boggs (our Rector) may be exonerated from the charge *of having prevented his election*."

You had written a long letter to our Rector, laying on him the blame of your non-election; that he had not mentioned your desire to be chosen, nor stated the important reasons, which, in your opinion, made your presence in the Convention necessary. He thereupon called us together, and laid the matter before us. And to show you that he was in no way the cause of your non-election, we passed and sent you the above resolution. We need not enter into this matter further. Enough has been said to show that there was cause for troubling you with our proceedings.

Again: you impliedly attack our veracity and our churchmanship, and insult, in a manner you have no right to do, our

feelings when you say, "It looks as if Judge Robertson and his political associates, Democratic and Whig, who at the last Easter election, as I learned from your Rector, invaded the church and elected a Vestry, had endowed you with their practice as well as their votes, and had transplanted from their caucuses to your quiet chancel the seeds of the political trickery that has so demoralized our country and disgraced our town." Surely, this is very bitter language—and what have we done to deserve it? Why should Judge Robertson, &c., be all brought in? We will explain somewhat more fully and accurately than you have done.

With the matter in dispute between yourself and Judge Robertson, we, either as a Vestry or as *individuals*, have had nothing whatever to do. The world knows that the difficulty arose regarding the Post Office at Katonah, a place "not more than two or three miles from the Jay Homestead," and not from church matters. It is true that on Easter Tuesday when the Vestry, but not the delegates to the Convention, were chosen, Judge Robertson and others were present at the election, and by their votes may possibly have prevented your re-election as Warden; you had, however, you must remember, sent a long letter to be read to the congregation, positively resigning your office as Warden, on the ground that all the rest of the Vestry differed from you on a certain question regarding where the second service should be held, and it may be that this letter and resignation of yours had as much to do with your non-election as Warden, as had the votes of "Judge Robertson, &c." The present Vestry was then elected in part by their votes; but except two to fill vacancies, (one your own, and another caused by a removal to the city), it consists entirely of persons who have thus served the Church for years; and if we may be allowed so to speak of ourselves, we are entirely above being influenced by "political trickery" or by "town politicians for political purposes," least of all in

church matters. You have been told that the gentle... presented in the Vestry the resolution you have printed, electioneered prominently for your re-election at the Easter meeting, rode about the country to obtain votes for you, and in the meeting, even after your resignation had been read, strongly advocated a re-election ; you have also been informed that a large majority of the present Vestry then voted for you, and disapproved of bringing a personal quarrel into church elections ; yet, *knowing this*, you would hold us up to the world, as influenced (*even in our chancel*) by "town politicians." There is no excuse for such a misrepresentation. It is a perversion of the truth ; we do not say a willful one. The fact is, that the reason given for your non-election was the true and only one ; and "Judge Robertson and his associates," whoever they may be, had nothing whatever to do with the election by the Vestry of delegates to the Convention.

You charge that the object of the Vestry was to "shield Slavery from rebuke," and you draw as an inference, that we are disloyal to the Government, and are influenced by "Sham Republican and Secession sympathizers" in our midst—grave accusations in these times. Sir : The community in which we live will characterize as it deserves such a charge—they know that we count among our number men who have, in their stations, done as much for their country as yourself. For the public, who know us not, but before whom you have thus seriously attacked our loyalty, we can only utter a most indignant denial of all such charges. We assert that we have done nothing in the least degree to justify your imputations, and that you ought to have known that it was so, and we hope that the positive declarations of nine honest men may outweigh the imputations of even Mr. John Jay.

Our resolution may have been carelessly worded ; we do not pretend to be men of literary attainments, that very

looseness of language might have shown you that politicians had nothing to do with it, they would have been sharper than we. We intended no "defense of Slavery," no "interference in its behalf." Your sneers in regard to this glance harmlessly from our consciences. It was because we would avoid the "dragging up of old issues," because we would keep out of the "church party broils," and prevent the drawing of "lines of separation," that we refused to send to the Convention, as our representative, one who in past years seems to have taken delight in agitating and embroiling, until his conduct was on the floor of the House stigmatized as "indecent."

Cannot you understand that we may really think the Convention of our Church is no place to discuss and act upon the slave-trade? And may we not feel the evils of that trade, and perhaps some of us be just as strongly opposed to Slavery itself, as you are, and yet not desire that these vexed questions shall be forced upon an ecclesiastical body which has no power of jurisdiction in the matter? This you have persistently done; we do not think it right, and therefore, as quietly as possible, sent some one else to represent this parish. The case of St. Phillip's, to which you refer, was so entirely different that we wonder a person of your intellect does not see it. That was a question whether colored churches should be admitted to seats in the Convention; the Convention, and it alone, had jurisdiction, and it was obliged to consider the case. The slave-trade is provided for by the laws of the nation. The Convention has no jurisdiction—so at least we think—and this is the plain fact of the case, and this alone. Our action had, and was intended to have, no bearing or reference at all on the state of the country, or upon the question of Slavery itself.

We are not unsupported in the opinion we hold in this matter—you very well know the manner in which the Convention has always refused to consider this question by an

overwhelming majority. In deciding, as we have done, that we will not be represented in that body by one who has persisted in forcing this question upon them, we are sustained by this their past action—the charge you have endeavored to fix upon us, falls with equal force upon them. We need not be ashamed that we should be assigned "a position on the future page of history" in the company of such good and wise men. With these remarks, having, as we hope, set the whole thing in a clear and true light, we conclude. We have no desire to be drawn into any further controversy, and trust there may be no need of again intruding ourselves on the public. Yours respectfully,

CHARLES RAYMOND,
WM. P. WOODCOCK,
AUGUSTUS KEELER,
J. J. COX,
JAMES H. BIRDSALL,
E. D. BROWN,
ROBERT BOLTON,
WM. LOCKWOOD,
J. W. HUSTED,

Wardens and Vestrymen of St. Matthew's Church, Bedford.

BEDFORD, *Sept.* 30, 1862.

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